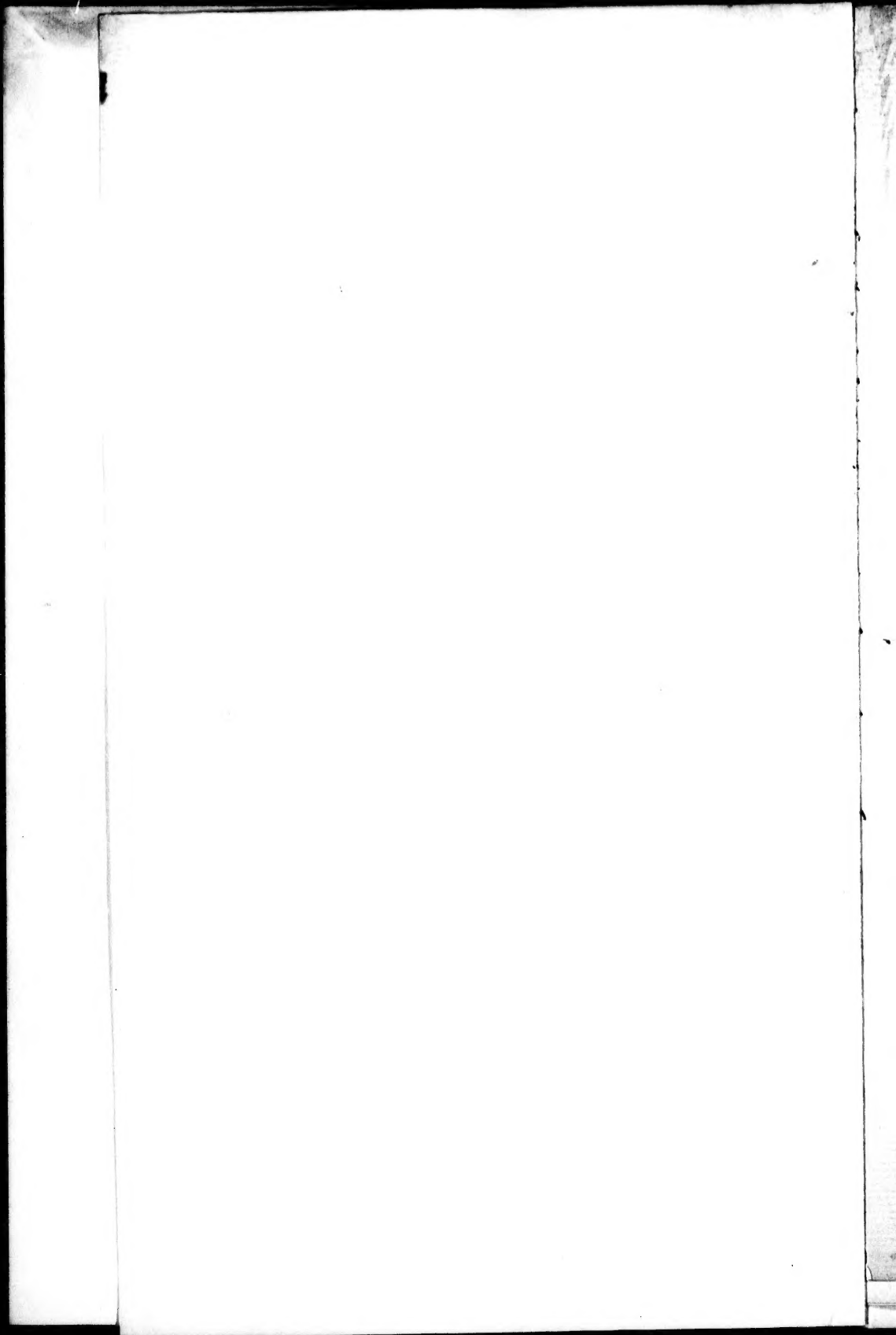




THE

PRIZE POEM,

AS RECITED ON THE 14th OF JANUARY, 1832,

AT THE EXAMINATION OF ■■■ UPPER CANADA COLLEGE.

THE

ABANDONMENT OF ATHENS,

BY ITS INHABITANTS AFTER THE BATTLE OF

THERMOPYLÆ.

BY H. SCADDING,

SEVENTH FORM, UPPER CANADA COLLEGE.

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THE
ABANDONMENT OF ATHENS,
By its Inhabitants, after the Battle of Thermopylæ.

A woe to Athens ! yea, a fearful woe !
A frown of ire her Gods upon her throw :—
From hill and grove the bitter wail mounts up,
She drains the dregs of sorrow's fullest cup :
Yea ! she—the Queen of many cities—stoops !—
Stoops to a foe !—her aged prowess droops.
Upon her sons a vial of wrath is pour'd,
Throughout her land is sent a thirsting sword :
No busy trains of sacred maids are seen
With airy footstep, and a sylphlike mein ;
No youth surround the hoary sage's chair ;
No cheerful friends to social baths repair ;
From household fanes no voice of joy rings out,
No strain of mirth, no children's laughing shout ;
No guests surround the hospitable board,
No minstrel strikes the soul-subliming chord ;—
All, all is mute :—surmise, and doubt, and woe,
Rack men, as they like shadows come and go,—
To whispered words, some lend the list'ning ear,
And some stand still, in silent musing fear.

With tenfold passion clings to home their heart,
When from that home stern fate would bid them part :
A thousand images of youth arise,—
Of mutual love, of kindred sympathies :
'Twas there like flowrest of the soil they grew,
When earth was happy, and man's word seem'd true ;
There pass'd youth's morn away, so fondly bright !
And left a faithless world in its true light :

These spots to quit,—these dwellings to forsake
 Before a foe, no noble soul bespake,
 But when from feeling they their flight abstract,
 Reflection shews them virtue in the act :
 They steel their hearts like Grecians for their fate,
 Quell soft regrets, and for the signal wait.—
 —Is Athens lost then, if they quit her plains ?
 Is Athens nought but lifeless stones and fanes ?
 —Her sons are Athens !—these the living soul
 Which moves the mass, and animates the whole :
 Forsa'en of these, a desolate void she stands—
 No prize to tempt the ruthless spoiler's hands :
 As when the Eagle which the huntsman's eye
 Strain'd with protracted watch, had mark'd to die,
 Far from his feather'd shaft heav'n's azure cleaves,
 And for his prey, a rocky eyrie leaves.

There was a struggle in them,—but they wrought
 Their souls up to the purpose, tho' the thought
 Oft shamed them :—now their destiny they feel
 To be, tho' keen, the harbinger of weal :
 Yet not so all :—th' anointed may not dare
 Desert the shrines committed to their care ;
 Minerva's priests, alas ! too fondly prize
 Her wooden walls, as where their safety lies ;
 Secure in these, and trusting on her hand,
 No words may force them from their hallow'd land :
 Old men too join'd them, and the silence broke
 As for the flight their sons prepared, and spoke :—
 “ And *we* !—do we our sacred country leave,
 Which gave us birth, and should our bones receive ?
 Shall we the air of foreign climates breathe,
 And round our brows an exile's chaplet wreath ?
 Too long have we our native tethix worn
 To see that symbol from our tresses torn ;
 Ye cannot from the hills transplant yon pine,
 And where ye will, a place to it assign ?

That pine are we !—lo ! the old crest it rears,
 Thro' which have howl'd the blast of many years ;
 Leafless and sapless where we grew, we fall !
 Involve ye not in our's the fate of all.
 No shield to you, no booty to the foe,
 We tarry here,—but ye, our children, go !
 Yes go !—for you ennobling prospects lie—
 The past dims not the daring of your eye :
 Yes ! go and move your young unconquer'd hands
 For deeds a future, brighter day demands !"
 Then gush'd afresh each exile's bleeding heart—
 And must they too from father, mother part ?
 Oh ! at those sounds what burning thoughts arise '
 What peaceful visions fleet before their eyes !
 The merry household ring—the blazing hearth,
 Brighten'd by love too passionless for earth !
 But tears may not the stern resolve recal—
 Unmov'd their sires devote themselves to fall.
 They could have seen those heads of silvery grey
 Melt from their dwellings one by one away
 As stars melt in the morn ;—they could have borne
 To see them fall, as falls the ripen'd corn
 Or mellow'd fruit, for then might they have sooth'd
 Their waning hours, the rugged passage smooth'd
 To the drear shades, and caught their parting breath,
 Tending with rev'rence due the couch of death ;
 But ah ! 'twas anguish to each clinging heart,
 Thus from its clasp, so suddenly to part
 Those, whose calm smile as mild as moonlight beam'd,
 And for bold deeds a meed of worth was deem'd ;
 Whose words so oft in simpleness, had cast
 To their young minds, a magic o'er the past—
 Painting in vivid lights tradition's lore,
 Of heroes, and heroic deeds of yore ;
 Of the bright hosts, and gleaming bands which shone
 Along the sward of glorious Marathon,—

Whilst young ears on their firing accents dwelt,
 Till each cheek flush'd, and youthful bosom felt
 Its noble passions wake, warm, kindle, flame—
 Stirring within one burning thirst of fame !
 Thus memory now touch'd chords which long had slept—
 The exiles felt the tones, and for their fathers wept.

A woe to Athens !—Lo ! her children come
 Forth from each pillar'd hall, and lowly home :
 See from yon cot, green with the spreading vine,
 Where thro' the leaves rich clusters dimly shine,
 Where the tall olive dark and coolly waves,
 Whose mossy roots a murmuring streamlet laves,—
 See from this scene of peace and loveliness
 Its inmates haste borne on in deep distress,—
 A sire, a mother, and a cherub child,
 Which scarce has yet on kindred faces smiled :
 Here had their fathers spent the live long day,
 And here themselves had caroll'd life away :
 Wealth crown'd their toil.—the seasons came and went,
 And flowers and fruits with happiness seem'd blent ;
 And they had watch'd the sun's departing light,
 When all things were as glad as they were bright,
 But ah ! the view of that blest picture now,
 But stamps despair the deeper on each brow.

With flocks all shepherdless each valley bleats—
 Dogs, masterless howl thro' the empty streets :
 E'en senseless brutes their share of sorrow know,
 And join the universal voice of woe.
 Young mothers to their hearts their infants press,
 And bow'd in grief their offspring sadly bless :
 Sons clasp their sires in one quick, last, embrace,
 While manly tears stream down each cover'd face :
 Then were the hurried rush, the self control
 Which knows but owns not anguish in the soul,
 The firm plac'd step,—the pale, grief-sunken cheek,
 The inward conflict told by looks that speak :

On, on they haste, a pitiable crowd,
 With moans, and sobs, and sighs deep-drawn and loud :
 'Then female hearts out o'er their eyelids swell
 When to their hearths they breathe the last farewell,
 Kissing the thresholds in their burst of love
 As to the shore the sad processions move.

But who exhorts them on from yon high prow
 With the bright keen eye, and the lordly brow,
 His dark cluster'd hair sporting wide and free,
 As he beckons them onward to the sea ?
 —'Tis Cimon !—he—the brave, the fair, the young—
 Who from his free-born neck so nobly flung
 The yoke of vice, e'en while his lip began
 To wear the garb or give the tone of man ;
 And there he stands !—to play the dastard's part
 Would bid his father from his cerements start—
 Would he then leave his home without a blow ?
 'Twould joy him well to meet the coming foe,
 But duty strives with the fierce native fire
 Which stirs him on to emulate his sire.

The signal blast peals loud.—No voice, no word,
 Nought but the moan of weepers now is heard.
 In speechless grief they sink the sullen oar,
 And from their sight repel their country's shore :
 Songless and sad the measur'd time they keep—
 Sternly they plough the drear, the conscious deep,
 Still yearning eyes gaze on the length'ning track,
 Twa'rds their dear home all tearful turning back,
 Where now in fitful gusts of vengeance broke
 The rolling columns of thick pitchy smoke,
 And flash'd the broad red flame up thro' the gloom,
 Sanguine with ruin—earnests of *their* doom.
 —But see ! far back, what rises on the waves,
 Buffets the waters, and the distance braves ?—
 —A dog !—blush, changeling man !—a faithful friend
 Whose bond of faith an ocean could not rend :
 The lord he loves the pole-star of his eye
 Which draws this proof of true fidelity :
 Still on he strives,—beats from his gen'rous breast
 The leaping wave which hides him in its crest ;
 Well his heart knows his master guides yon sail,
 And while that swells, ne'er will his courage quail :
 True to his aim, he near'd the destin'd shore,
 Plied his full strength,—alas ! he could no more,—

Faint and worn out, he there his lord descried,
 Crawl'd to his feet, and lick'd his hand,—and died !
 On, onward from their homes the exiles speed—
 Again they gaze,—again their bosoms bleed :
 The sun in glory thron'd sank broad and fast,—
 The thought rush'd o'er them,—'twas their city's last !
 Each dim blue hill, grove, vine-yard, field, and fold
 Brightens and mellows in the flood of gold ;
 The parting rays yet linger but to kiss
 The hoary brows of old Acropolis,
 Whose graceful fanes, and shafted temples glow,
 And purer hues the Parian pillars shew.
 —Tint after tint now fades, like Hope, away,
 'Sorb'd in the splendor of the king of day,
 Who couch'd and curtain'd in the fiery west
 Down, downwards sinks, full royally to rest.
 Forth flies the evening on her dusk wings,
 And o'er the exiles' path her mantle flings,
 Along the waves as moonlight music dies
 So melted Athens from their lingering eyes.

Nor weep ye, exiles, for ye yet shall see
 Yourselves undrooping, and your city free ;
 As bows the cypress till the storm be past
 So Athens bows, but breaks not in the blast ;
 Yes ! tho' her plains be ravaged and defaced,
 Again shall they with towering piles be graced ;
 Again her fanes shall stand in sculptured pride,
 By genius rear'd, by virtue sanctified ;
 With richer gems again her brows around
 Dominion's bright tiara shall be bound ;
 Her sons shall guard each consecrated spot,
 Her sword shall rule, her power shall waver not ;
 More zealous youth Cephissus' shades among
 Shall catch Truth's essence from the sage's tongue ;
 The poet's lip shall glow with purer fire,
 When fame shall bid him wake his country's lyre ;
 And thus shall Athens from the passing night
 Rise like the sun in renovated light ;
 Yes ! thus shall Athens know a second birth,
 And still shine forth the glory of the earth !

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